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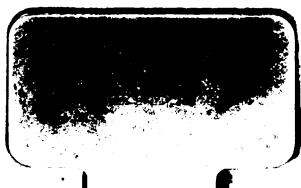
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STELLA MAGGIE
-AND- MAGGIE









"Is SHE DYING?"



STELLA AND MAGGIE:

OR

BRAVE HEARTS.

By MRS. J. D. RONALD.

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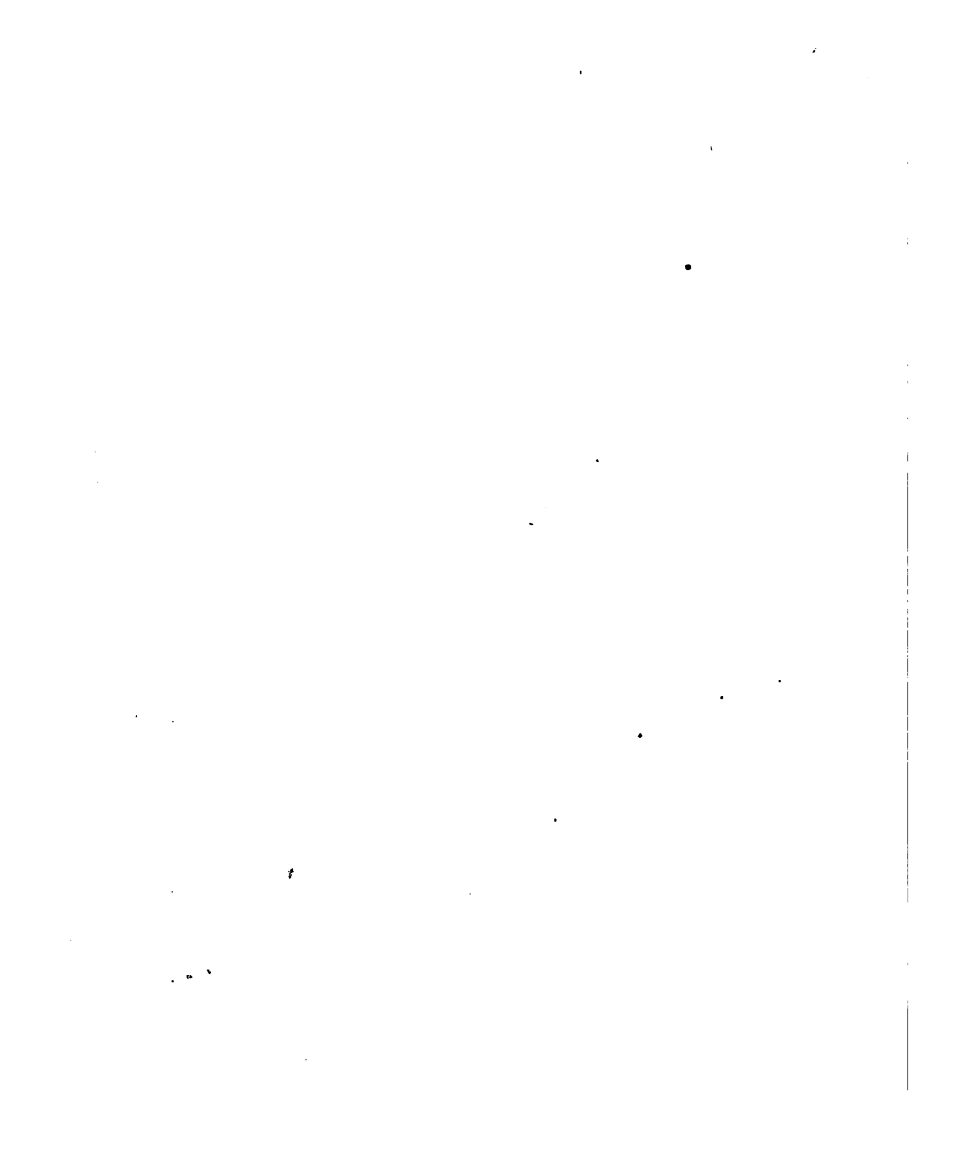
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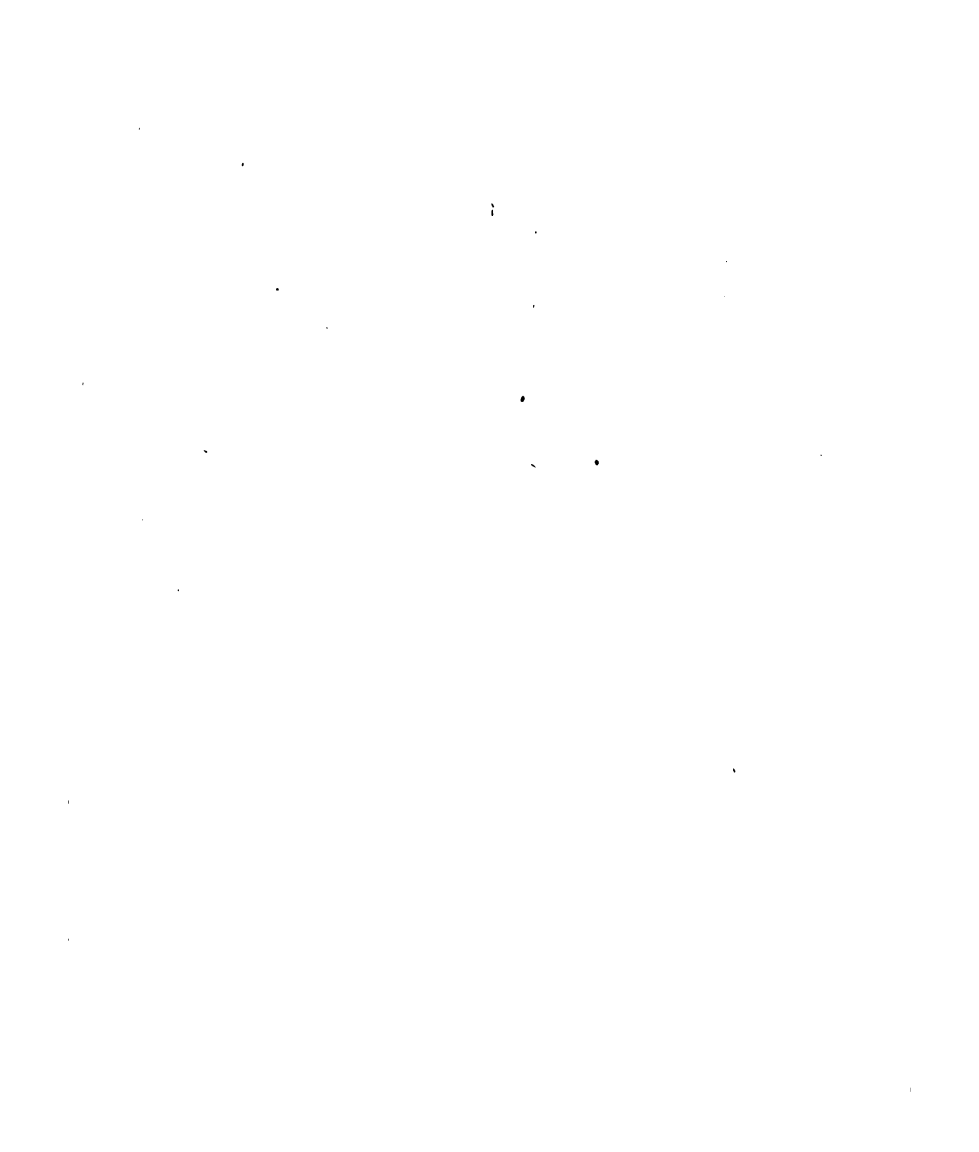
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STELLA AND MAGGIE.

CHAPTER I.

HOME LIGHT.

"**K**ISS me, darling mamma," said a little girl of six summers as she wound her arms round her mother's neck and drew her head down on the pillow. The nurse had just put her to bed, and as was Mrs. Seymour's custom, she had come to hear her little daughter repeat her evening prayer, and kiss her ere she slept. After kissing her, the mother said in a sweet, quiet voice, "Now, Stella darling, pray."

The little girl unwound her arms and reverently folding her hands and closing her eyes began, "Our Father in heaven, fold little Stella to thy bosom, and give her a new heart. Bless dear mamma, bless dear papa, bring him

home safely, and take care of us all through the night for Jesus' sake, Amen." On opening her eyes, she saw a large tear drop on the pillow. Alas! wealth and luxury are no barriers to suffering. This home, which might have been an Eden for peace and sanctity, was being overshadowed by sin and sorrow.

The child, looking up, with trembling lips asked, "Has Stella been naughty to-day, dear mamma, that you cry?"

"No, my darling," replied her mother, clasping the child convulsively to her bosom, "you are my own good little daughter, my treasure, my very star. But go to sleep, or you won't wake up bright and rosy as mamma wants her little girl always to be."

And again she kissed the child. The little one looked as she would fain have asked more, but closing up her eyes tightly as if to woo sleep whether it would come or not, she said, "I will, mamma, for I mean always to be your bright little girl."

"God grant you may, my darling!" replied her mother. The lady crossed the room, lifting some dainty piece of needle-work, and drawing a cozy chair in front of the bright fire, sat down, grace in every motion. She was a beautiful and noble woman, a fireside heroine, hiding her life's trial in her heart, and meeting the outside world with a smiling face. How many do the same! How bright her future seemed eight years ago! Then she had left her

happy childhood's home as the bride of Louis Seymour, the rich and fascinating young lawyer, and had settled down in her husband's beautiful mansion with quiet, full joy; and when, two years after, her little Stella was born, her cup of joy seemed full. She felt her God was good. Yes, God is good and wise, too, in hiding the future. The society of the lawyer and his lovely wife was ardently courted, and gaiety followed gaiety in constant round, but often in the midst of it all Mrs. Seymour felt it was hollow and disappointing. After the birth of her little girl she remained more at home, pleading home duties. Sometimes her husband would ask her to join him at the evening parties he liked so well, but gradually his desire for her company seemed to fade, and many a lonely evening had she passed in her elegant drawing-room. But now when her little daughter went to sleep she sat beside her, her one bright hope. How she clung to the child! She had called her Stella from a fancy of her own, but now she was truly her star, lightening up the deepening gloom of her life. Hour after hour she sat straining her ears to catch her husband's step, alas! how often now unsteady. The wind had risen, and was sighing in fitful gusts through the fine old elms that lined the avenue. Twelve o'clock struck; the house was quite still, the peaceful breathing of her little daughter soothing her aching head and burdened heart.

"When will he come," she murmured, "my still noble husband? Eight years ago he said no power on earth could rend the bonds that knit him to me; but now—"

A loud ringing at the bell stopped her thoughts; her little daughter started in her sleep, but heedless of everything she rushed down-stairs to the hall. On opening the door, her husband staggered in. He stumbled into the nearest chair, leaving his wife to shut the door. Dashing his wet hat from him, he leaned helplessly on the table.

"Take off my boots, you useless baggage," he growled. "Are you paid for standing there glaring at your master?"

"I will, dear," answered his wife gently.

Looking up savagely, and trying to rise with his hand clenched, he roared, "How often have you been told to attend to your own business and let me attend to mine? I'll have no sneaking and watching here, mind. The next time I find you at this business I'll turn you out of doors."

His wife evaded the blow, but he fell heavily across the parlour door, and ere long was sleeping soundly. With the help of her faithful nurse she dragged him into the room, took off his wet coat, spread a bed for him on the floor, and left him to wake in the morning full of remorse and promises for the future. Useless remorse, useless promises. "At the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." No aim, no love, no tie is proof against the alluring influence of drink. The next morning Stella

awoke bright and happy. A streak of sunshine lay across the carpet, making the child's heart dance for very joy. She jumped out of bed and tried to pull up the blind. The morning was full of glory—calm, soft, and lustrous, as often succeeds a night of storm. Everything looked fresh. The trees in their autumn garb of many-tinted leaves, studded over with pearly drops of rain, looked like a fairy scene. The door opened and Mrs. Seymour entered. "My little daughter is up," she said, and soon the tiny figure was enfolded in her arms and a morning kiss pressed on the white brow.

"Isn't it a beautiful morning, dear mamma? The light seems playing hide-and-seek among the trees, and the rain-drops look like diamonds."

"Yes, darling, it is a beautiful world. God grant you may keep pure and holy, and be at last a gem in the Saviour's crown!"

The nurse then entered to dress the child, and the mother descended the stair to look at her other dear one. Inwardly she prayed that God would keep her darling free from earth's stain, and help her to bear its sorrows. Her husband opened his eyes on her entrance, but said nothing. Time after time had confession been made and improvement promised; but now his wife had lost faith in it all, her only help was in God. She had told him his safety alone was in total abstinence, but he only sneered, adding,

"No, I will never join that army of self-denying fools." Either his moral courage was too weak to take a stand, or the chains of intemperance were too strongly riveted. Mrs. Seymour in her sorrow went and told Jesus. She left her erring one with her God, feeling He knew all. Quietly she left the room. Immediately Mr. Seymour rose. Ere long he appeared in the parlour. Stella was standing in front of the fire, and on hearing his step turned round with:

"Good morning, papa," offering her beaming face for a kiss.

Her father stooped and lightly touched her forehead, feeling how unworthy he was of such a daughter. The trio sat down at the breakfast table, the child prattling on in her happy innocence, not knowing how sad her parents' hearts were. The husband seemed ill at ease; and when his letters were brought in, scanned them hastily, then picked them up and abruptly left the room. In a few minutes they heard the hall door shut, followed by receding footsteps. His now almost constant neglect so unnerved his wife that she burst into tears and buried her face in her hands. How desolate she felt! How sadly the years rolled on; no joy for her now; her future was all dark. Stella had quietly stolen near her and put her little hands on her lap, trying to rouse her. She felt the child's fingers intertwine with hers, and raising her head she said, "God

forgive me! not all dark so long as my star shines;" and taking the child on her knee she pressed the little velvet cheeks to her own.

"Stella is sorry, dear mamma," said the child, the tears dimming her fine blue eyes.

"My darling, what vexes you?" asked her mother.

"Mamma is sad, that makes her little girl sorry."

"We'll take our griefs to Jesus, will we, Stella?"

"Yes," replied the child, nestling closer in her mother's arms. "My little hymn says:

"I bring my griefs to Jesus,
My burdens and my cares;
He from them all releases,
He all my sorrows shares."

"Yes," thought this sad woman, "'out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise.'" And both kneeling, the mother prayed. She asked the Saviour to shelter her in his mercy, and strengthen her to bear her burdens and to shield her little daughter from trial. When they rose the child asked, "Has Jesus shared your sorrow, mamma?"

The mother felt rebuked. "Oh! for a child's faith!" she said; "I hope he'll do so, my daughter."

After attending to her household duties, Mrs. Seymour taught her little girl; but to-day she felt such a burden

weighing her down as quite to unfit her for everything. The promise of the morning was fulfilled in the bright forenoon. Nature all around was full of praise; the birds sung a perfect chorus among the dewy branches, but poor Mrs. Seymour's heart could not respond.

"Stella," she said, "I think for once we'll leave the lessons and take a walk."

"Good mamma," replied the child; "how I have been envying the birds hopping on the branches and chirruping so merrily. And will you come out, mamma? so nice!"

"Run then, darling, and get nurse to dress you."

The child skipped off full of joy: "A walk with mamma; how delightful!"





CHAPTER II.

MIXED SCENES.

“**W**HERE shall we go?” asked Mrs. Seymour when they had got outside the gate.

“Won’t you come and walk down the river bank?” asked the child.

Southbank was a considerable town situated on a fine deep-flowing river, spanned by a handsome bridge. There was one main street, lined on each side with shops, and the outskirts were studded by many fine houses. On an ordinary day the streets were often very quiet. The Seymours sauntered along leisurely surveying the shop-windows, but as they crossed the bridge they were attracted by a crowd of people coming up the bank bearing some weight. As the crowd passed they saw a policeman carrying a fine little girl wrapped in a shawl.

Mrs. Seymour asked what it meant.

“Oh!” said a boy, “it’s Maggie M’Leod’s wee girl.

She's out washing mostly every day, and the bairn wandered down to the river and fell in. If it had na been for the policeman looking over the bridge at the time she would have been drowned. Meg's a fine wee lassie. It's an awful sin for her faither to drink sae much and leave his wife and bairn."

"Drink again!" sighed Mrs. Seymour. "Will my Stella be one day as uncared for?" she thought. "Where does she live?" asked she; "I should like to see if I can help them."

"They've muckle need o' help," said the boy. "M'Leod was as fine a man as need be, a grand workman, and kept his wife weel till he fell into drink; but now he's left them a'thegether, but they're better without him."

Having learned where they lived Mrs. Seymour and Stella continued their walk. Mrs. Seymour walked slowly along, engrossed in thought, now and then pressing Stella's hand, as if by her strength of will she would guard her from all harm. As the image of the sweet child just rescued from death rose up in her mind her womanly nature felt instinct with power to wage a crusade against the foe. Had she not begun at home as all true women should, but how had she been foiled! How stained even her own home had become. Stella, noticing the varying expression of her mother's face, and wondering at her being so quiet, asked, "Why are you looking so sad, dear

mamma; are you thinking of the little girl and her cruel father? Isn't she a beautiful little girl? Did you notice what large dark eyes, and what lovely curling hair she had?"

"Yes, but," replied Mrs. Seymour, "drink has hardened her father's heart and made him forget his little girl."

"Will you take me to see her, mamma?" asked Stella eagerly.

"Not to-day, dear, but sometime, I hope. If I find Mrs. M'Leod worthy, I'll try and get some work for her to keep her at home, and then you may go with me to see her."

In the afternoon Mrs. Seymour set out to find Mrs. M'Leod. Her house was situated in a back-court off one of the lowest streets of the town. At its entrance two ruffian-looking men were standing smoking, and sounds of quarrelling issued from within. Mrs. Seymour shrank back instinctively from such surroundings, but one of the men, respectfully taking his pipe from his mouth, said, "They'll do you no harm, ma'am. If you tell me who you want I'll show you the house."

Mrs. Seymour said she sought Mrs. M'Leod. The two men looked at each other and shook their heads in ignorance.

Mrs. Seymour said, "Her little girl was nearly drowned to-day."

"Oh!" said both the men at once; "wee Maggie's mother!

we know now;" and the one who had offered to show the house preceded her up the court. Two bullying women stopped their quarrel and fixed their bloodshot eyes on the visitor. What different types of womanhood—the pure, true, and good, and the debased, low, and vile! Did they feel this, the poor wretches, and did the contrast rouse their worst passions? Soon their fight was renewed with wild intensity. The man pointed out the door and knocked. Mrs. Seymour thanked him, and politely lifting his shabby bonnet he walked off. The door was at once opened, and Mrs. Seymour told her errand.

"Come in, ma'am," said a noble-looking woman, evidently "wee Maggie's mother." Dark lustrous eyes and fine rippling black hair, with trim tidy figure. "Take a chair," said she, placing the only chair the room could boast (with the exception of a child's tiny one) in front of a good fire. The room told of honest poverty, bare but clean. Mrs. Seymour kindly drew her out in order to learn her circumstances. She appeared to be a woman of great common sense and shrewdness. Her replies were very cautious at first, but gradually she began to feel her tale of woe would be safe, and as she unfolded her burdened heart, tear after tear fell on her honest hands. She told Mrs. Seymour what a kind husband she once had, and what large wages he earned till he began to drop into the public-house. "Ma'am," she added, "I never pass these places but I

shudder: I would not have the publican's blight on my soul for a world of money. Far rather would I be the poor washerwoman with a quiet mind than have all their gains. There never can be a blessing with it. What a dreadful life we led latterly! Many a time my Maggie and I were turned out, and had it not been for the kindness of a Christian woman up-stairs we would have been houseless. More than once has he sold all we had in the house, and over and over again have I bought all back. Had it not been for my wee Maggie I would have sunk under his cruel usage, but the dread of leaving her uncared for nerved me anew, and now the comfort she is to me no one could guess. She is really the only joy of my life. Had she been drowned I would not have cared to live, indeed I think I could not have borne life any longer. But God is gracious. I live now in a constant dread my husband may come back, and if not reclaimed all our old misery 'll return." The child now moved and opened her eyes.

"Mother," she said, "are you there?"

"Yes, my darling," replied her mother approaching the bed. "How are you now?"

"I feel so nice and happy. I've been dreaming about the angels. Do you think Jesus 'll want me now?"

"I hope not yet, my own Maggie. Do you want to go and leave your poor mother here all alone?"

"No, my dear mother, I would like to stay and be your

comfort if Jesus wills. I have only you and Jesus," and the little tired eyes closed, and the child was again locked in sleep.

The noise outside now grew deafening. Mrs. Seymour wondered how the child could sleep through it all, but the wearied little sleeper slept on. "Do such scenes often occur?" asked Mrs. Seymour.

"Almost every day," replied Mrs. McLeod. "As soon as I can find a quieter place I'll leave this, but our kind friend up-stairs is so good to Maggie that I feel she is quite protected when I am out; but to-day she is from home, and the child wandered to the water."

A loud scream, followed by a crash, drew them both to the window. The stronger woman had knocked down her foe, and now stood with vacant stare looking on. Three ragged children appeared on the door-step. A tiny child of about two crept to where its mother lay and patted the bloated face. A gruff, dogged-looking man approached the woman, and giving her a kick, told her to get up. Opening her eyes, she answered with a groan, "Oh my head!" but fear giving her strength she sat up. The ground was stained with blood, and a red stream trickled down her dress. "You've got no more than you deserved," said her husband; "get indoors with your brats and keep quiet." The other woman had skulked off. Soon the court was quiet, and Mrs. Seymour took her leave, promising to send

some delicacies to the child, and also to try and get some indoor work for the mother. Her heart was full of admiration for both mother and child; they seemed like Lot in Sodom. On her way home she planned to find a house for them in a quieter place, and add some additions to their scanty furnishing, feeling sure her care would not be misplaced.

As she entered the avenue leading to her home she saw her husband and a gentleman descend the hall steps. There was no need of an introduction, she knew his companion well. He was one of the town exquisites not famed for temperance.

"I just called," said Mr. Seymour, "to tell you not to wait dinner for me, as my friend has invited a select party this evening."

"Indeed!" replied his wife, her face full of sadness. Just then Stella, who had seen her mother enter the gate, tripped down the steps, and running up to her kissed her hand, fondly saying, "Welcome, dear mamma, how I've wearied for you!"

Mr. Lister, who had a keen eye for the beautiful, fixed a searching gaze on the child. She was a dainty little fairy. Her transparent complexion, liquid blue eyes, and masses of long fair curls were enhanced by contrast with a rich black velvet dress.

"Shake hands with Mr. Lister," said her father. The

child gave the stranger an inquiring glance and shook her head. "I'd rather not, papa."

"Why not, darling?" asked her mother, amazed at the child's reluctance.

"You don't like papa to stay away from home, and no friend would keep him," she said, looking up in her mother's face for approval. Mr. Seymour frowned and cast a passing look at his wife. Mr. Lister winced under the rebuke, but lightly answered, "Please yourself, my little queen," and turned away with "Good afternoon, Mrs. Seymour."

Mr. Seymour lingered an instant, and gently laying his hand on his wife's shoulder said quietly, "Do not fear, dear. All will yet be well."

The only reply his wife gave was a deep sigh. Well she knew to the contrary. It would be a repetition of late hours and drunken revels. She entered her beautiful home with her child tripping by her side, a sad, sad woman. The elegant surroundings but mocked her woe, and recalled with never silent voice the sorrow of her life. "Thank God, I am not desolate," she thought, "so long as I have my precious child. Her glad, bright life lights up the gloom."



CHAPTER III.

LOVING WORK.

NOW quickly time rolls on. To some, many years pass by in one unvarying round, bringing few changes, to others they are full of incident. Seven years had glided past. To Mrs. M'Leod they had brought ever-increasing comfort and peace. Mrs. Seymour had taken a deep interest in her, and had got her removed to a nice house in a quiet neighbourhood. She had added many comforts to it, had also got her a sewing-machine, and by enlisting the aid of private friends kept her in constant employment. Maggie had also been sent to a good school, and the girl gave promise of amply repaying her care. Her lessons were no trouble to her, indeed the reverse. At every examination her success was more marked, and her teacher had become very proud of her bright pupil. But success never elated her, her mind was so finely balanced, and she had anchored her young heart in her Saviour's keeping.

She had a great love for music too, and lived in an atmosphere of song. She was constantly singing. She said "she could not help it, she supposed it must be natural to her like the birds." She had joined a Band of Hope conducted by her minister, and her memory was stored with temperance melodies. She took especial delight in warbling these, and many a sermon did she preach in her ministry of song. To the toiling neighbours her life was one long sermon. The worn seamstress would catch some word of cheer and resume her weary stitching. The tired mother with scanty fare and many little mouths to feed would listen and toil on. Husbands have been roused also to strive against the curse of their lives and have gained the victory.

Her attendance at the Band of Hope was punctual, and by her quiet attention she cheered her minister's heart. He knew her character well, and sometimes when dispirited in the cause of temperance the girl's earnest look would rise up in his mind and he would feel his work not useless.— One evening the wind began to wail, and the rain coming on it was dashed pitilessly against the closed window. The fire was blazing brightly and the room looked cosy and cheerful. 'Mrs. M'Leod had just finished some work and folded it away. Maggie had been busy at her lessons, but suddenly looking at the clock she rose, removing her books and slate. "I didn't know it was so late," she remarked.

"You're not going out to-night," her mother said. "Don't you hear how wild it is?"

"I must go, mother; I promised," she added, noticing her mother's wistful look; "and mustn't promises be kept? Now give me a smile before I go. I couldn't be happy with the memory of that sad face."

"I'm only afraid you'll catch cold."

"No darger of that. I never had a cold in my life. I'm made of good stuff," she added laughing. The mother smiled, and the girl, getting her hat and jacket, began to put them on.

"I'll tell you all about it, mother mine," she went on. "I have found out one of the school-girls has a father that goes too often to the public-house, so I just asked her to come to the Band of Hope with me. You know I succeeded with the other two, so I'll try again, and I must not disappoint her."

"You're a brave girl, Maggie, but I fear your friend won't come out to-night. Do you hear that?" she added as a wild gust lashed the rain on the window.

"I'll go and show how I value the meetings;" and she began to warble, "We'll stem the storm." Her mother wrapped a plaid round her, and the noble girl set off on her mission of mercy. Doubtless breasting the storm her heart would be singing. Nothing could daunt her sunny nature. Her mother often wondered at her yearnings

over the drunkard, it seemed with her a passion. She never spoke of her early infancy, but Mrs. M'Leod sometimes thought that maybe sad memories hovered round her, urging her to work. Her character resembled a deep-flowing river with bright ripples dancing on its surface, but still steadily flowing on to one end. Her companion was dressed waiting for her, and they set off together. On the way she poured her troubles into Maggie's ears. But it was no new tale of woe. She told her how well off they once had been, but now their mother had to save and pinch to make ends meet. "But that was not the worst," she added; "her father had taken away some of the furniture and sold it, and the night before had come home brutally drunk and struck her mother, and "there never was a better mother," said the girl sobbing. Maggie comforted her, telling her to hope he would be yet all she wished.

The story read at the meeting was of the success of a pledge-card in restoring a father to temperate habits.

"How did you like the meeting?" asked Maggie.

"I've got a good idea, thank you for asking me to go. I'll get a pledge-card and do the same."

It was many months after this before Maggie knew the result of the pledge-card. Her companion regularly attended the Band of Hope meetings and did all in her power to bring others. She had reaped benefit herself, and she wished to help as much as she could. One evening

as the two girls were walking home, she told Maggie she had got a beautiful present that day. "Could she guess what it was?"

Maggie knew her companion had a great desire for a paint-box, but she said she could not guess.

"My father gave me a beautiful paint-box. It's just perfect!" she added.

"Your father?" asked Maggie incredulously.

"Yes," said her friend; "I feared to speak to you about it, for I dreaded it would not last. He has been an abstainer for seven months. All through the pledge-card."

"How glad I am!" was all Maggie could say.

"Yes, Maggie. I feel I can never do enough for you; you have been the means of giving us back all our old comforts. We have once more our kind father and happy home."

One afternoon Maggie returned from school later than usual. Mrs. McLeod had been steadily sewing all day, as she had promised to return the work she was engaged on that evening. She did not notice her daughter's entrance till she came up to her, and gently laying her hand on her shoulder, said sadly, "Still sewing, mother? how tired you must be! I wish I could keep you without such constant work."

Mrs. McLeod stopped her work and looked fondly up at the sweet thoughtful face. "I *am* tired, my daughter, as

I have been working longer than usual to-day. I promised Mrs. Seymour she would have the work to-night."

"Will you let me take it home? I want to see Stella. It's more than a week since I've seen her, and I want to tell her something."

"Yes, dear, we'll both walk out to-night. The evening is beautiful, and I will enjoy the walk."

A tender sympathy had sprung up between the two girls though their paths in life were so different. Maggie's admiration for Stella was unbounded, and she consulted her in everything; while Stella was very proud of Maggie and rejoiced in all her success.

"Now, mother," said Maggie coyly, "I'm going to ask a favour, and you mustn't say no."

"Well, what is it, temptress?" asked her mother, smiling.

"That you give me peace from that machine-burr. Sit in the easy-chair with folded hands while I get ready the tea."

"I think I will, for I am really tired. Why are you so long past your usual time? you are a full half-hour."

"I was getting a music lesson," replied Maggie, laying the cloth. Coming to her mother and fondly patting her cheeks, she said coaxingly, "Now lie back like a good mother, and close your eyes and rest while I infuse the tea and complete the etceteras, and then I'll tell you all."

The mother, touched with her daughter's thoughtful

care, leaned back, a tear slowly trickling down her cheek. "What's the matter?" asked Maggie; "have you got something to vex you to-day?"

"No, dear, I feel very happy."

"A tear of joy," said Maggie, and began warbling in a low tone. Soon the deft fingers had finished their task. Sitting down on a low stool and taking her mother's hands she pressed her lips to them: "Poor hard-wrought hands, some day I hope they'll rest."

"What do you mean, Maggie? I have never been above working, and glad to have it so long as it is honest work."

"But all work isn't equally paid, mother mine," said the girl, "and if I could do something that would support us both would you not rest then?"

"No, dear, you're not old enough to provide for us both yet."

"Oh! no," said the girl, shaking her head, "not yet, but by-and-by."

"We'll not think of by-and-by," replied her mother. "I sometimes wish the present quiet life would always last."

"I would not," said her daughter quietly. "I hope there's a far brighter future before us than the present."

"Now, Maggie," said her mother, smoothing back her dark hair "confess; what has Miss Lawson been putting into your head now?"

"A quick flush mounted to the girl's temples, and smil-

ing she said, "You guess something, then, do you? I'll tell you all;" and in low earnest tones she told her Miss Lawson had proposed a plan that she should study music with the prospect of becoming a professional singer. The mother was startled; such an idea had never entered her head, and as she looked at the eager up-turned face of the girl as she explained away all her difficulties a pang shot through her heart. Her guileless daughter exposed to the snares of such a life! No, it would never be; she would willingly give her life's blood to save her from such a career.

"No," she said shivering. "If that is your bright future, Maggie, I fear it will never be."

The girl's face clouded. "How, mother?" she asked. "Miss Lawson says God always gives us gifts for some purpose, and if I have been of use with my simple girl's voice, how much greater good might I not do when I could sing to hundreds? And, mother," added she rising in her eagerness, "to toil for you would be worship."

Mrs. Seymour, who was consulted, warmly approved of the plan, promising help, and adding, "With Maggie's character and decided piety there was no danger."

Miss Lawson the next evening unfolded her plan to Mrs. McLeod. She thought that with four years' training Maggie would be fully qualified. She would teach her two years, then she might be sent to a master in the town

for the third year, and after that to a professor in Edinburgh, who, by his influence, would launch her on her career. Mrs. McLeod somewhat reluctantly agreed to the scheme, and Maggie began her course of study with eagerness.





CHAPTER IV.

PATIENT WAITING.

WHILE Maggie's life for the last seven years had been a happy and peaceful one, Stella's had been the reverse. The course of the drunkard is ever a downward one. Mr. Seymour's reputation was gone, his splendid practice had dwindled away to an occasional case, and the once fascinating lawyer now spent the most of his time in hotels or public-houses with boon companions. He made a pretence of attending to business, but his office was too gloomy to remain in, or soon some of his friends came for him, and the rooms were left in the keeping of a clerk. Had it not been for Mrs. Seymour's fortune they must have been reduced to absolute poverty. Her father had died a few years previously, and had wisely left his daughter's fortune bound up at her own disposal. Their beautiful mansion had been sold, and Mrs. Seymour had bought a comfortable cottage a short distance from the town. They were secure against want, but their lives were

beset with constant trial and affront. Stella had now become her mother's companion, and often her adviser too. The stern everyday sorrow of her life had developed a wise prudence far beyond her years. She was now a tall graceful girl of thirteen, her fair young beauty tinged with deep thoughtfulness. Mrs. Seymour's health had given way—worn out under constant anxiety. It was beautiful to see with what assiduous care the daughter anticipated her mother's wants, and tried to save her from grief. Frequently, on returning from school with a companion, her tipsy father would cross her path, or she would see him loafing about a public-house door. If he noticed her he always tried to shrink out of sight, and her companions never mentioned him; her quiet dignity silencing any remark. Their cottage lay some distance from the town, and if she felt not able to meet her mother with her usual smile she would linger about till she had calmed her mind. Often the young girl's heart was nigh breaking, but she asked strength to bear up for her mother's sake. Often, too, on her knees would she entreat her Saviour to save her drunken father, and, as if her prayer was heard, no one had the same power over him that she had. Her one great aim was to rescue him, and night after night would she search for him in the public-houses with her faithful nurse, always bringing him home, and never did she receive any insult.

One evening in the month of August her mother and she had passed the time alone, Mrs. Seymour reclining on a couch. Stella had been reading, but was now sitting wearily, with her head resting on her hand, gazing into the fire. Taking out her watch, she rose and quietly leaving the room opened the front door. The air was balmy, laden with sweet scents. A gentle breeze wafted a delicious perfume from a bed of mignonette planted in front of the cottage. The girl closed the door and walked down the foot-path to the gate. It was a splendid night. The sky was one deep vault of blue, studded over with a few bright stars. She opened the gate and looked along the road, then came back and leant her head against it. "Oh! my Saviour is this never to end? Peace everywhere but in our poor sad hearts." And the girl sobbed bitterly, but all at once she raised her head saying, "This'll never do, I must work," and returning to the house she went up stairs, and putting on her hat, and wrapping a shawl round her, knelt down and prayed for strength. The nurse had heard her go out, and was with Mrs. Seymour in the parlour.

"Your night work again," said her mother sadly, as she came in.

"Yes, mamma, it's past ten," she answered stooping in front of the couch. "It'll cease some day; kiss me before I go and pray."

"God bless you my daughter," said her mother, the tears streaming down her cheeks. The other servant entered the room to keep Mrs. Seymour company, and Stella and the nurse set off. The girl opened her mouth gaspingly as if to inhale all the fragrance of the garden, and the nurse pulled a half-blown rose and gave it to her.

"Thank you, Ellen," she said; "how kind you are!"

They walked on for some distance in silence. "You're a mystery to me, Miss Stella," said the nurse, "you're no more than a child, and you do things a mature woman would not do."

The girl started: she had been thinking bitter thoughts.

"I sometimes wonder at myself, Ellen, but you know there's no one but me to do it, and I just get strength; and wouldn't it be worth all the trouble if I could save my father? How sad he looks sometimes. I feel he would like to do well, but somehow he's so weak. The other night when I was praying for him, I felt so crushed I cried out in perfect agony, "Oh, God, save my father, or I must die;" there came over me all at once such a holy calm, and that passage rushed into my mind of the king holding out the golden sceptre with, "Thy request is granted." I rose from my knees with perfect confidence that he must be saved.

"God grant it," said the servant.

They had now reached the town, and all the shops were

shut except the public-houses, which were brilliantly lighted. Stella knocked at the door of the hotel she knew her father frequented. A waiter told he was there.

"Will you show me where he is?" asked Stella. The man preceded her through a long lobby, and opened the door of a back room, leaving her to enter alone. With beating though undaunted heart the girl stood at the entrance trying to distinguish her father amongst the half-dozen men who were seated round a table. It was covered with decanters, bottles, and glasses; the fumes of the toddy actually stifling the girl. Her father was seated at the farthest side of the room. Quietly going up to him she put her hand on his arm, and said firmly, "Papa, come home with me, please."

The loud laughter and coarse merriment suddenly ceased; all eyes were turned on the girl. Her calm, pure appearance formed a strange contrast to that ribbald scene. At once her father rose. Staggering up against Stella she fell, her forehead coming in contact with a chair. All was bustle and confusion now, the drunken lot thinking something terrible had happened. Stella soon regained consciousness, and taking her father's arm led him out. The blood was oozing from the wound, and although the pain was very sharp she made no sign of suffering, only pressed her handkerchief to her forehead to stem the blood. The party soon broke up, their mirth for one night at least

effectually checked. When Stella reached the street the nurse, noticing how pale she looked, and, that she pressed her handkerchief to her temple, guessed something had happened, but dreaded to question her. The trio walked on in silence, Mr. Seymour becoming at every step more difficult to support. Stella, too, felt her strength giving way, everything was beginning to reel round her. The constant strain on the nervous system, with the shock she had just received, proved too much for the brave girl.

"Oh! Ellen, I fear I'm ill," was all she could say, when she fell heavily to the ground. Steadying her master on a railing she stooped over the insensible form. "Has she tripped?" asked her father in a listless voice; but slipping down on the ground his head fell on his shoulder, and he was soon fast asleep.

"Oh, God! has he killed her now?" sighed Ellen, lifting the fair young head on her knee. The sweet face was calm but very pale, the deep cut from which the blood still flowed giving it a ghastly look. How could she leave her to get assistance? Would she cry out or would she wait a few minutes to see if consciousness would return? The noble girl had done her best to shield her father from the world's scorn, but now her life was at stake. Instinctively she looked to heaven for help. The glorious moon in full splendour was sailing through the azure sky. Nature, still grand, smiling, but, alas! helpless, looked down on the sor-

rowful scene. To nature's God she sent a prayer for help. With heartfelt gratitude she heard a door open, and a foot coming down a gravelled path. In a few seconds the step stopped, and turning round she saw a young man.

"Will you bring me water, please?" she asked abruptly; "this young girl has fainted."

The doctor's quick eye took in all the circumstances at once. In a moment he had lifted the inanimate form in his strong arms and carried it into the cottage. Ellen followed, leaving the stupid father to his drunken sleep. Stella was laid down carefully on a sofa, and the stranger applied restoratives. For some time they were of no avail, and Ellen feared that life had fled. Crouching down in front of the sofa, her burdened heart sought relief in tears; she sobbed in agony. Taking no notice of her, Dr. Harcourt continued his efforts to restore the girl. Gradually the blood began to tinge the pale cheeks, the lips trembled, and a quiver passed through her whole frame. The nurse looked up shivering. "Is she dying?" she asked.

"No," replied the doctor, "she's coming round. Be calm," he added, "you must not let her know how alarmed you have been. Do you know that man outside?" he asked quietly, "he's in rather a dangerous position. Should you not help him? I'll get my mother to watch here."

"No, I'll not leave my darling: if it not been for him she would never have been here," added the faithful nurse,

overstepping prudence. The doctor made no reply, but seeing Stella open her eyes motioned to Ellen to speak to her, keeping himself out of sight. Bewildered she looked round the room, and fixing her eyes on Ellen she asked eagerly, "Where am I, Ellen?"

"I'll tell you all by and by," replied Ellen quietly, soothing her.

"Don't disturb her," said the doctor, and left the room. Returning in a few minutes he waved on the nurse to come to the lobby. "If you tell me where to take your master, I'll get him removed home. The young lady must remain here to-night."

"And what shall I do?" said Ellen, wringing her hands, "I must go with him. Mrs. Seymour can't manage."

"No, you must stay here," said he firmly. "I'll go and explain all."

Ellen felt everything would be right. The doctor had impressed her with a sense of trust; his quiet, calm, self-reliant, but kindly manner having quite won her confidence. In a few minutes the doctor returned with a lady whom he introduced as his mother. Taking her up to the sofa where Stella lay, he said, smiling, "I will leave this young lady-patient in your charge, as I have some out-door work to attend to."

"But I must go home," said Stella, trying to get up. The effort, however, was too much for her feeble strength,

and closing her eyes wearily, she moaned, "Oh! poor mamma!"

"I'll go and tell her you will stay here all night, and let her know there is no cause for fear."

"Papa!" then gasped Stella.

"I'll attend to him too," said the doctor quietly.

"Thank you very much," said the girl, holding out her hand to him; "you are very kind. Ellen, go home; I'll get on nicely without you."

"Shall I go or stay?" asked the nurse, turning to the doctor, who was leaving the room.

"Either way; my mother is a capital nurse," added he, looking fondly at the lady.

"Go, Ellen," said Stella, "and comfort mamma; tell her I hope to be home in the morning."

On reaching the gate it was evident Mr. Seymour had never moved. He was still sleeping soundly, unconscious of all that had happened. Stepping out into the middle of the street the doctor looked anxiously along the road.

"I've ordered a cab," said he to Ellen, returning. Then he shook the drunken man roughly, saying, "Wake up and get home."

A growl was all the answer he got. Again he shook him even more violently than before. "Can't you wake up? you have slept long enough on the ground, I'd think."

Still no answer. "Could you help me to lift him?" said he to Ellen; "I can't manage him alone."

With their united effort they raised him from the ground and let him lean on the railing.

Opening his eyes, he asked drowsily, "What's the matter?"

"Matter enough," replied the doctor in a stern voice. "Don't you know your daughter's ill?"

With a maudlin stare he repeated, "Daughter ill, did you say?"

"Yes," replied the doctor, "you've made her ill."

Suddenly the late scene seemed to return to his mind. "I hurt Stella! No, I stumbled and knocked her over. Oh! my angel daughter!" he moaned, burying his face in his hands. "Take me to her, will you?" he pleaded.

"Not to-night," replied the doctor sternly. "She'll be better by the morning, and then you may see her."

Drawing himself up to his full height, and grasping the railing for support, he growled, "Who are you that dare dictate to me about my daughter? No stranger shall thrust himself between us two?"

The doctor fixed his quiet dark eyes on him, but said nothing. He knew the rage was but passing.

"Here is a cab," he said gently, as it drove up. "Let me assist you." Unresistingly he allowed the young man to put him in, and, sinking down on the seat, was soon again

snoring heavily. On arriving at Rose Bank the doctor roused him, saying, "Get up, you're now home."

"Home!" he echoed, wakening up and looking round dreamily. "Where is Stella?"

"Likely asleep," replied the doctor quietly.

"No, not asleep and her father uncared for!" he answered indignantly.

"Uncared for!" the doctor replied in a worried tone; "you're just too well cared for. If you had proper self-respect you would never use that word. Do you think her patience 'll last for ever?" added he, looking angrily at the heavy burden he was dragging up the garden walk.

"As long as her poor father needs her," he moaned.

"Oh! my Stella! my Stella!"

Mrs. Seymour met them at the door, anxiously asking for Stella, her whole frame quivering with fear.

"Safe," replied the doctor in a kind soothing way.

"Where shall we take our charge to?"

"I'll show you," replied the nurse.

Mrs. Seymour lingered a second at the door expecting to see her daughter, but on her not appearing she followed the others to the bed-room in terrible excitement dreading to ask more. After they had put Mr. Seymour into bed, the doctor, turning to leave the room, saw Mrs. Seymour had sunk into a chair, wringing her hands.

"Tell me, oh tell me about my daughter! Where is

she? What is the matter?" she questioned, giving the doctor no time for reply.

"She is quite safe. There is no cause for alarm. I left her with my mother, who will attend to her as if she were her own daughter," he replied, his fine thoughtful face full of pity.

"Is she ill?" again asked Mrs. Seymour eagerly.

"Tired out, nothing more," said the doctor.

"Tell me all, I can bear it," said Mrs. Seymour leading the way to the parlour, her hand pressed against her heart to still its throbbings. The doctor followed, shut the door quietly, and sat down. How could he tell all to this fond mother? Her appearance told a tale of health lost through anxiety and grief, and dare he add more? Musingly he sat and pondered how to give her the facts of the case. With hands still clasped, and eager anxious look, she gazed at the young man as if to scan his every thought. In careful studied tones he explained all, adding, "She could not be in better keeping than my mother's; she has both skilful hands and a kind heart, and," said he, rising with a smile, "if you will allow me to prescribe for you I would advise rest too, and you shall have your daughter safe in the morning."

"Good night, and very many thanks," said Mrs. Seymour, accompanying the doctor to the door. How still all nature lay around, the outer world was full of peace, not

a breath of air ruffled the quiet of the night. The only sound that broke the stillness was the echo of the young man's footsteps as he wended his way homeward. His thoughts were very sad; how could they be otherwise?

For some days Stella continued weak and ill, but gradually the young strong life grew well again. So long as she was ill her father spent his time in the office, regularly returning home in the evenings and sitting by his daughter's couch. Sometimes he would steal out to the garden, pace up and down the walks, always bringing in to the tired girl a fresh bright bunch of flowers. Sometimes she hoped her trouble had come to save him, and willingly would she have sacrificed her health to gain such an end. But, alas! the force of habit was not so easily broken. As her strength returned, her father, too, returned to his old haunts and ways. The long sad evenings came back again, and Stella's weary search was renewed. Winter followed Autumn, and Spring Winter, but still the bitter trial of their life continued, only deepening. The pretence of business was still kept up, but the office door might have been shut for all the business that was done. The forenoon was often far advanced before the drunken debauch of the previous night was worn off. His health too, once so vigorous, was giving way, and dark clouds of melancholy often oppressed him. Frequently, too, severe attacks of illness occurred, causing grave fears for his life.

Sorrow at these times was professed and promises made, only on recovery to sink deeper than before.

Summer had again come round. Everything looked smiling and glad. The cottage where such sorrow was borne charmed many a one. The garden was gay with brightly-tinted flowers, and their rich fragrance filled the air. Roses and honeysuckle wreathed the porch, and wafted a delicious odour through the open windows. Rich lace curtains draped the deep oriels, and choice flowers were placed on dainty tables. Outside it looked a perfect haven of peace. Mr. Seymour had just recovered from the worst attack of illness he had ever had. Dr. Harcourt had now grown to be a valued friend, and had attended Mr. Seymour through all his illness. During these attacks Stella rarely left her father, constituting herself his nurse, bathing his aching brow, and cooling his parched lips, till his petulance would give place to contrition, and his eyes would follow the slight form everywhere. Then, too, would she speak words of comfort to the troubled heart till the poor oppressed one forgot his woe. At every illness she hoped he would amend, but her hopes were always doomed to disappointment. Patient, hoping heart, hope on, thy God still reigns! His promise is true, "Whatsoever ye ask in faith, believing, ye shall receive."

The doctor had just left the room where his patient lay resting on the sofa, still weak and exhausted. Stella fol-

lowed him to the door. His manner was hesitating and constrained, as if puzzled how to act.

"Is papa worse?" asked Stella in low frightened tones.

"No, not worse," said the doctor evading the question; but added, seeing Stella expected more, "I would like to tell you about him; something you ought to know. He is not worse though," he continued soothingly.

"Oh tell me everything," said Stella beseechingly. "Will he die. I must know all."

Leading the way to the drawing-room the doctor placed her on a couch and sat down beside her. Taking her hand he asked in quiet kind tones, "Can you trust me, Stella?"

"Yes, always," she replied unhesitatingly.

"You know I'll do my best."

"Yes," she answered firmly.

Again he demurred. How could he burden her with such a secret. He knew she was bound up in her father, and still she should know.

"Well then," he said gravely, "your father's heart is affected. He may survive many years if great care be taken, and if he give up stimulants; and I'll do all in my power to prolong his life."

Stella had heard no more than that her father's life was in danger. With her face buried in her hands she was sobbing in low gasping sobs. Death to him had never

entered her thoughts, and the shock quite unnerved her. Death, and not ready!

"Oh! my poor papa!" she moaned, "How can I part with you?" Everything was blotted out but this great grief. The doctor walked over to the window and left the girl to weep out her sorrow alone. Had he done right? he asked himself. She would be now even more careful than she had been if that were possible, and at anyrate she should be prepared. Soon her great self-command crushed down her grief, and drying her eyes she stole up to the doctor. Absorbed in his own thoughts he did not notice the action. Gently laying her hand on his arm, her eyes wandering to the bright scene outside, she murmured:

"Thank you for telling me."

The doctor started, asking quickly, "Did you speak to me?"

He felt deeply grieved for the young girl in her great sorrow. With weary upturned face she said, "I was only thanking you for telling me about papa. Can nothing be done to save him?" she asked breathlessly.

"Not much, I fear," replied the doctor, shaking his head. "But I need not tell you where to leave him."

"Oh! no," said Stella, the tears falling fast; "and if I knew papa was ready for death I think I could give him up. I must know now," she said firmly.

"You must point him to the Saviour," said the doctor.

"He knows all about Him, but I fear he doesn't trust Him, and you know *that* makes all the difference," she said gravely.

"Yes," said the doctor, repeating her words, "all the difference."

He had often wondered at the young girl's strength, but now he knew the secret. In a few days Mr. Seymour was able to return to the office. Every place was thick with dust, and cobwebs were hanging from the walls. The grate and hearth were white with ashes, and the floor was littered with useless papers. Everything bore the marks of careless neglect. The man sat down and leaned his head on his hands. He felt wearied and miserable. His life rose up before him like a picture with scenes of happiness and gloom. It might have been so different. No one had a better chance than he had, but all his opportunities were lost, and now where was he? Ruined. "Oh!" he groaned, "ruined for time and eternity too." Shattered in health, no hope here or hereafter, all, all shadowed in gloom. "I can bear it no longer," he said, rousing himself, "I shall end it all."

With sudden resolution he took a sheet of paper from his desk and wrote a note to Stella asking her to forgive him and to try to think kindly of him, saying too she had been the only joy he had known for many years. He wrote, "Within, around, beyond, all, all is dark. Forgive me, my

darling, and may God shelter you from every harm till he gathers you to his fold above." With trembling hands he sealed the letter, inclosing a diamond ring he always wore, and placed them in the desk. Kneeling beside the chair he pleaded in agony for forgiveness, then left the room, locking the door behind him. With vague uncertain steps he wandered in the direction of home, something drawing him thither. When he reached the gate Stella was busy amongst her flowers. On her father's entrance her fair young face lit up with smiles; "Oh, dear papa, so soon!" she said, going up to him.

Her father made no reply, only lingered near her.

"Are you tired?" she asked. "Had I known you would come home so soon I would have met you," she added, linking her arm in his. "Come, dear papa, and rest on the sofa."

"How beautiful the garden looks!" said her father sadly.

"Doesn't it? Would you rather rest in the summer-house, instead of inside?" asked Stella fondly.

"I think I would," replied her father.

Stella noted the faltering step and absent manner, wondering to herself if the end were near. Earnestly she prayed he might be spared till he had found the Saviour. Wearily he seated himself in the summer-house, his eyes wandering listlessly over the garden. Stella took his hand and patted it caressingly.

With a wistful look at the young girl he said, "How can you love me, Stella, when I've been such an unkind father to you?"

Without lifting her eyes, and still holding his hand, she said, as if speaking to herself, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"So loved," repeated her father absently. "Maybe there is yet hope for a poor wretch like me;" and as the dreadful deed he had intended committing rose to his mind he shivered. A sharp spasm shot through his heart, and his face turned deadly pale. Gasping for breath, he pressed his hand on his side. "What is it, papa?" asked Stella in dread.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Seymour. "It will soon be over. I have these pains often now."

"Have you, papa?" said she sadly. "Will you go in to the house?"

"No, dear; this is very pleasant."

"Yes, isn't it a snug nest?" she said cheerily. "See that broiling sun looks as if it would burn up everything, but here it is cool and sheltered. Yes, dear papa," she went on, "if we are safe in Jesus' arms we will be kept from everything that would hurt us. His love is a sure resting-place." Her father listened, but said nothing. In front of the summer-house there was a splendid bed of lily-of-the-valley. Stella pulled a spray, and bringing it to her father,

said, "Let me put this into your coat, papa, its delicious fragrance may be refreshing to you. I always like the lily-of-the-valley; it is such a pure, lovely flower."

It was but a trifling act from a loving heart, but she had saved her father. Years after he showed her the withered flower laid carefully away in a secret drawer, and prized as one of his most sacred treasures. He would now strive, and hope, and wait. He thought it would not be long.

"Stella," he asked, with eager earnest look, "do you still love your poor papa?"

"Why do you ask, papa? have I ever seemed as if I didn't love you?"

"Even though I have saddened your young life as I have done?"

"Dear papa, do not ask me any more. I am sure you know I love you fondly," said she, the tears stealing down her cheeks.

"My daughter," he said solemnly, "I would like to live and wipe out the past, but I feel it cannot be. Something here," putting his hand on his heart, "tells me my days are numbered; and I do not feel grieved for myself; I am so weak to resist temptation."

"But God is strong; He would give you strength," said Stella quietly.

"It is better as it is, my death may teach a lesson of warning."

"But," said Stella twining her arms round his neck, "I cannot give you up with only that. You must love my Saviour, and then we will only be parted for a little while."

"Do you think He would have me, my Stella?" he asked kissing the soft cheek. "I can do nothing for Him now, and all I have to offer is the remnant of a wasted life."

"Yes, papa, it's 'whosoever will;' does not that mean you?"

"Even me," he murmured, and covering his face devoutly he prayed, "My God, I give Thee all I am—poor, miserable, vile; accept me for Thy Son's sake. Amen."

"Amen," repeated Stella, and silently she thanked her God for His goodness.

Carefully did Stella watch every change in her father, scarcely ever leaving him. When he went out she was always his companion; when he was resting on the sofa she was always near him, ready ever to attend to his wants, and he seemed to want no other. The tie between the two was growing stronger every day, and Stella felt the parting would be very bitter. The doctor saw that Stella was wearing herself out, but to every entreaty she only answered, "I cannot leave him." The girl, with her simple, child-like trust, was constantly leading her father's thoughts to divine subjects. He always listened eagerly, assented to all she said, and would often ask her to sing a hymn. When she spoke of heaven and pardon a peaceful smile would light up his face, at other times his lips

would move as if in silent prayer. Patiently, with anxious longing, she waited for one word of comfort. All through the dark days of Winter he lingered on, weak and suffering.

The early days of Spring were bright with sunshine. The birds warbled in the hedges, and the air felt warm and balmy. One afternoon he was resting on the sofa, propped up with pillows. Stella was sitting on a low stool beside him with a book in her hands, but oftener looking at the sleeper. He had slept tranquilly for more than an hour with quiet natural breathing. He moved and opened his eyes. Stella was at once by his side. Putting his arm round her, his face radiant with a holy peace, and speaking in low subdued tones, he said:

“Darling, have I been sleeping?”

“Yes, papa, so tranquilly,” she answered, crushing down her grief. She feared the end had come.

“Then I’ve been dreaming,” he said slowly. “All looked so real.”

Mrs. Seymour now came forward to the sofa and asked if he felt worse.

“No; much better, dear,” he replied smiling sweetly. “I’ve had such a glorious dream. I thought,” he went on turning to Stella, “I lay resting here, when all around there shone a flood of light, and a bright-robed angel stood in the midst of it. In a soft musical voice, and pointing heavenward, she said, ‘Come.’ Gradually I felt myself

rise, borne by some unseen cause up, up far beyond the clouds, till we approached a beautiful city bathed in glory. Its gates were of pearl, and its walls jasper; entering we walked on streets of gold. Such a flood of melody filled the air that, entranced, I stood to listen; but my companion taking my hand led me on. In the centre there was a throne which gave light to the city. On the right, One stood like to the Son of Man. Such a beautiful face, full of benign compassion! Falling down in adoration I was casting my crown at His feet, when in tender upbraiding tones he said, 'Not yet, my son, not yet. I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat. Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.' And then I saw far, far away, it seemed in this world we had left, great numbers of suffering, tried people, all seeking comfort and peace. I lingered, not willing to leave, but the angel again took me by the hand and led me to the gate. I awoke with the word 'work' lingering in my ears." During the recital of the dream all his languor had passed away, and his pale face assumed the hue of health.

"Papa," said Stella with a happy smile, "don't you think your life is to be prolonged?"

"Yes, my child, I do, and by God's strength I shall devote it to His service. A few months since I felt tired of life, and would gladly have laid it down, but now I

rejoice if God will give me an opportunity of serving Him. My best days are over, but I may do something yet."

Just then the doctor entered.

"How are you to-day, Mr. Seymour? you look quite fresh. If this fine weather would but last we might have you pretty well again."

"We must use the means," said Mr. Seymour quietly.

The doctor wondered at the cheerful manner of his patient, it was so unlike his usual way, but took no notice.

From this date Mr. Seymour improved rapidly, so much has the mind influence over the body. His dream was the wave to send him back to the world's shore. Before this his mind was depressed, only wishing to die, but now he had become hopeful and anxious to live and work. Of his future work he always spoke humbly, so chastened and subdued had his spirit become. Sometimes when fits of exhaustion would come on he would say, "I am willing either to live or die." "To me to live is Christ, and to die gain." And yet there was no parade of religion. He was too humble and knew his own weakness too well. Stella felt repaid for all her care; often now she was heard singing when alone, as if her happy heart must find relief. As the summer advanced Mr. Seymour's strength increased; but still great care had to be taken, as after any unusual exertion the old weakness returned. In early autumn the

doctor advised that the Winter and Spring should be passed in a warmer climate, confident that the change and balmy air would confirm his strength. Both Stella and Mrs. Seymour were in need of change too, so their arrangements were soon completed, and with their faithful nurse they were ere long on their journey.





CHAPTER V.

PEACE AT LAST.

FOR the last three years Maggie M'Leod had made the theory of music and the training of her voice her principal study. Miss Lawson for the first two years had expended great care on her, Maggie in return teaching her junior classes. The third year she had taken lessons from a master who predicted great things for her in the future. The young girl was very happy, she was in high health, her time was fully occupied, her home was peaceful, and her prospects were bright. But she still remained the same ministering child, true and good. She had a kind word for every one. Nothing was too menial for her to perform if she could help any one; she would nurse a neighbour's child, sit by a sick bed, or help her mother with her sewing.

Her mother and she left Southbank about the same time as the Seymours. Mrs. Seymour had procured for Mrs.

M'Leod a situation as housekeeper, and Maggie was to live with her and continue her musical studies.

During the year Maggie was introduced into musical circles, and had on several occasions sung at private soirees, charming every one. She was now a tall graceful girl of seventeen, with quiet winning manners. Her dark waving hair was worn in thick rich coils, which suited her classic head. Her fine face beamed with intelligence. By the time she was launched on her public career she had promised to sing at several concerts. Her teacher, who occupied a high position in the musical world, determined to introduce her, as her sweetness and great talent had quite won his interest. Several well-known artistes willingly promised their services, and the programme was drawn up. Maggie M'Leod was entered on the list as a rising artiste of great promise. Now when her life-work was about to begin she shrank from public gaze, and earnestly wished her sphere had been quieter. How often this happens! When the coveted prize is within reach, it all appears unsatisfactory and false.

As the time approached, her nervousness increased so much that she felt impelled to throw it all up and seek some quieter employment; but her teacher kindly promised all needed help, and told her the trial would soon be over.

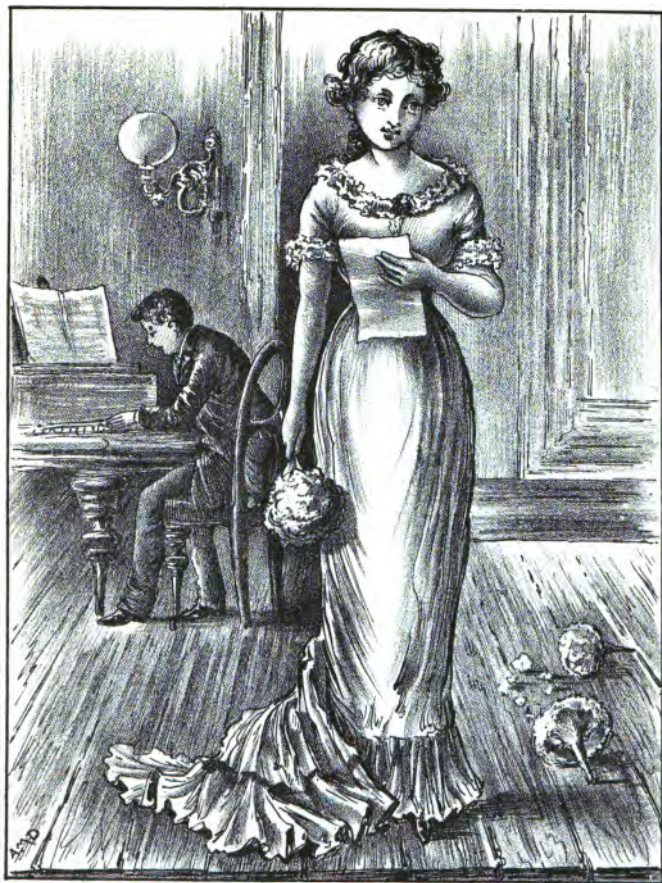
The afternoon before the concert a stout man in working clothes was lounging along the streets taking no interest in

anything or anybody. Stopping in front of a public-house he dived his hand in his pocket and commenced rattling some money. A second thought struck him, for he darted off in an opposite direction and stood transfixed. The name "Maggie Macleod" in large letters caught his eye. Carefully he read over the bill, always returning to the familiar name. How many sweet memories did it recall! His mind wandered back twenty years and dwelt lingeringly on the happy time. Such a good true woman she was! What a happy home they had had, and how proud he was of their bonnie wee Maggie! Then followed a dark picture; his cruelty, and after that his desertion, and since then the many chances of getting on he had lost, and all through drink. How long he stood he never knew, but darkness had come on, and the shop-windows were lighted before he turned his steps in the direction of his lodgings. Could it be his Maggie? he pondered. It was not possible. No one would take such an interest in them, and his wife was too modest to push her daughter forward. He determined to go and see at any rate. All night he lay awake in a perfect tumult of suspense. Early in the morning he rose and went in search of work. His lodgings were in a low part of the city, but he was known to many firms as a capital workman when sober. He soon got work, and kept at it steadily the whole day. The hour for the concert arrived, and the hall was crowded. All the artistes were

high-class, and the young girl who was to sing for the first time was known to many either by report or personally.

James McLeod had bought a ticket and was seated in the back seat of the gallery. He had come early, afraid of losing a place, and now, restless and excited, wished he had not come. There was no chance the singer would be his Maggie; but he was fond of music, and it would wile away an hour. While he was musing, chords had been struck on a piano, and now Thalberg's beautiful "Home, sweet home" was welling out in rich harmony, and as the air sounded clear above the rippling accompaniment it seemed like the yearnings of a wanderer far, far from home. The man's heart was touched, and he felt miserable. All his lost comforts rose up before him. No home, no peace, no rest, alone and desolate, and the strong man bowed his head in agony. The music ceased, and the hum of the vast gathering was hushed. All waited in breathless suspense, with eyes directed to the platform. The new singer stood before the audience waiting till the symphony was played. She held in her hand a lovely bouquet, and was dressed in simple white, with no ornament but a rich damask rose nestling in her dark hair. Her lips slightly trembled, and her colour came and went, but otherwise she looked calm.

At first there was an evident quiver in her voice; but as she proceeded the tones rolled out rich and full, and when the last notes died away, a burst of applause followed.



THE NEW SINGER.



Maggie retired, but the audience, restless, demanded a recall. The girl returned and stood for a second lost in thought, then folding her hands firmly she began in plaintive, low tones the temperance melody, "Father, come home." The simple pleading pathos of the words, with the beseeching "Come homè," moved many to tears. On her first entrance her father had started to his feet, the perspiration standing in great drops on his forehead. The people beside him saw the movement, but shrank back frightened at his wild haggard look. Gradually, however, the sweet tones of the young singer soothed him, and he sank down passively, the wild haggard look leaving his face. "It was his Maggie, there was no mistaking the face, only educated and refined." Strangers had done for the girl what her own father had refused to do. What a longing came over him to ask her to forgive the past cruel neglect! But as he listened to her splendid voice, and saw how much she was admired, the lonely deserted feeling returned. She was far above him now, and she would scorn such a father—a common working-man. He knew he might have been higher had he resisted temptation, but there was no use trying now. Sadder and sadder did his future seem—nothing but loneliness and misery.

With hungry longing eyes he followed his daughter as she retired, then hid his face to keep in the sweet vision. He was roused from his gloom by the words, "Father,

come home" falling on his ear. He felt in a dream. He dared not lift his head; the tears were falling fast, yet he heard every word. When she sang "Poor weeping mother and me," her voice trembled, and he could bear it no longer. Shaking with emotion he staggered out, but descending the stairs the pleading words, "Come home," rang clear and loud, sending a message after the desolate man. Brave, good girl, your simple song has done its work! Hurrying to his lodgings he prayed long and fervently for forgiveness and strength to resist temptation. Peace and calm filled his mind, where before tumult and sorrow reigned. He laid his plans for the future. He would take the temperance pledge as a safeguard, work hard, and by-and-by he would write to Maggie when she need not be ashamed of her father.

Months passed, and his master had come to consider him a steady reliable workman. His appearance, too, was changed. The listless lounging gait had given place to a firm step and erect bearing. At every concert where Maggie sang he was present, and had once or twice got a glimpse of his wife. He did not skulk into the back gallery now, but took his place amongst the respectable part of the audience.

Another year passed, and by a stroke of good fortune James McLeod had been made partner in the firm. The senior partner retired from the business, and his son

wanted one who understood the work. James M'Leod got the offer, and humbly accepted it; knowledge and not money was wanted. He felt very happy and grateful. He was still in his shabby lodgings, and had been pinching and saving, but now he would get a better house, and would write to his daughter. His letter was kind and humble. He told her that her simple song had won him back to the right, and by God's help in the future he would in some measure redeem his errors. The girl's joy knew no bounds. Putting her arms round her mother's neck she wept for joy. "God is very good to let me be the means of saving him. For years I have prayed for it, and though I often thought it folly to hope, I could not give him up. I think we have nothing more to wish for."

What a joyful meeting it was! one of those scenes that are sacred. They soon had a peaceful happy home, doubly dear because of the long separation. Maggie's father wished her to give up singing, but she replied laughing, "It is my mission and I must abide by it; and then, you know," she said seriously, "I can reach many by my voice that otherwise I could not influence."

She was always pleased when her gift of song did good, and nothing gratified her more than singing at temperance soirees.

One morning on looking over her letters she saw the

Southbank postmark. Opening the letter eagerly and reading it, a smile played round her mouth.

"What is it, Maggie?" asked her mother. "Something seems to be pleasing you?"

"Read for yourself," she answered, giving her the letter.

"Will you go?" asked her mother anxiously.

"Yes, if you let me, and I'll go through all our old neighbours and give them each a ticket for auld langsyne," she replied merrily.

"What are you saying, Maggie?" said her father, who was resting in an arm-chair busy with the morning's newspaper. Another engagement, child? they'll wear your life out.

"From my old Southbank master, asking me if I have forgotten my promise to let the good folk there hear me sing," said she, and with an arch look she asked, "Will you go?"

"If you want me," he answered quietly. That was enough. Her father never denied her anything. His confidence in the girl's judgment was firm, and her wish was his law.

It was a brilliant afternoon when they arrived at Southbank. Maggie, true to her promise, visited all their old neighbours, giving each a ticket for her concert; her good fortune hadn't spoiled her, she still retained the old kind sympathy

The doors of the hall were early opened, but long before the beginning of the concert the building was filled. Group after group came in, keeping up a constant stream of motion. Amongst the latest arrivals was a party of four. A tall, stately gentleman with fine benevolent face, and hair thickly streaked with gray, led in a pleasant-looking lady of middle age. They were followed by a younger couple, and as the gentleman spoke in low soft tones to the lovely girl at his side it was evident she was all the world to him. The group will be easily recognized as our old friends the Seymours and Dr. Harcourt. They had but returned the previous week, and Dr. Harcourt had early resumed his acquaintance. Mr. Seymour was far from strong, but was working and waiting till the Master called. Mrs. Seymour too would never be robust, but her life now was tranquil and full of peace. Stella was still the star of their home, cheering both parents with her bright buoyant ways. After the concert the doctor accompanied them home. At the gate Mr. and Mrs. Seymour bade "good night" with the doctor and hurried in.

"Good night," said Stella, but the doctor held her hand, and in quiet earnest tones asked, "Stella, do you remember a night like this five years since?"

"Yes," she answered, shivering, "like, and yet how unlike! The outer world looks quite the same, and yet my world is entirely changed."

"Another question," said the doctor, his dark eyes fixed fondly on the fair upturned face; "do you remember me once asking you if you could trust me, and you answered, 'Yes, always.' Would you give me the same answer yet."

"Yes," the girl replied, "I know no change in you."

"Then I want you to trust yourself to me always," he said.

"Could I be of use to you?" Stella asked simply.

"Yes," he answered earnestly, then in his usual quiet way said, "You have taught me many a lesson in the past, and I still need your influence. Will you, Stella?" he pleaded.

"I will," she replied.

Reverently he stooped and kissed the fair pure brow; his heart was satisfied. He knew the self-sacrificing and loving influence of the woman would shed a religious light over his home in the future, as it had done over her father's life in the past.



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